

EDUCATING ONESELF FOR MINISTRY: FRANCIS ASBURY'S READING PATTERNS

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Basic ministerial patterns of Methodism using local leadership both lay and clergy, while developed in England, were ideally suited to eighteenth century America. Easily adapted to the frontier situations found in this country, Methodist educational patterns designed for a ministerial force arising out of local communities were also attractive and well suited to America. Like many American pastors, English Methodist laypastors seldom enjoyed formal education, but John Wesley developed successful information patterns ensuring that one who served among the Methodists would not lack for knowledge to sustain the demands of ministry.¹

Wesley's practicality produced a two-fold pattern to train his helpers. First, Wesley adopted the craftsman's apprentice as an efficient model for ministerial training. Local society participation produced class leaders, exhorters, and local preachers who were natural assistants to the itinerating clergy. These persons, if they proved to be dedicated and effective in the local society tasks, were logical candidates to fill the ever expanding ranks of itinerating lay pastors. Pairing such a local leader with an itinerating pastor the system helped candidates for the itinerancy learn their "trade" through direct experience. Following the precepts and examples of their mentors they soon became independent itinerants themselves. This training method gave the Wesleys a continuing supply of assistants.

The second element in the training came from Wesley's own dedication to education. In *Minutes* of the first Methodist Annual Conference, 1744, the preachers were instructed to "read the most useful books, and that regularly and constantly." When one of the preachers evidently commented, "But I have no taste for reading," Wesley responded, "Contract a taste for it by use, or return to your trade."² If they had no books Wesley promised to supply them as fast as they could read them. Next to the scriptures, his own numerous works, particularly his *Sermons* and *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*, became primary texts. To supplement these personal materials, he entered a life-long practice of publishing the works of Christian leaders he felt would be instructive to the Methodist people. Most of these were abridged, sometimes extensively, and provided in inexpensive bindings for widespread dissemination.³

¹The present article is based on an expanded version first published in *The Divine Drama in History and Liturgy*, a Festschrift honoring Horton Davies, ed. John E. Booty (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1984).

²John Wesley, *The Works of the Reverend John Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson, 14 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.) VIII, 315.

³For an analysis of Wesley's method of abridgement see Thomas Herbert, *John Wesley as Editor and Author* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940).

Apprenticeship to an experienced preacher, albeit often rather brief, supplemented by a life-long pattern of reading became cornerstones of Methodist ministerial education for Wesley's "connection." The effectiveness of this two-fold method of ministerial training was repeatedly attested to by the success of the Methodist preachers.

American Methodist Ministry

Irish Methodist immigrants organized the first societies in America in early 1776. As the movement expanded, local ministers were enlisted for service in the societies. Their training followed the apprenticeship pattern Wesley had established in England. Jesse Lee and Freeborn Garrettson, renowned early American Methodist leaders, appreciatively recounted their entrance into ministry through such apprenticeship training.

What of the second element of the British pattern? Lee in his history of American Methodism quoted Wesley's regulations concerning education for ministers and recounted how Methodists in America early began to reproduce Wesley's works for ease of distribution.⁴ The few books mentioned by Garrettson relate to his early Christian experience before he became a Methodist.⁵ Neither Lee nor Garrettson provided an extensive catalogue of their own readings, but they made it clear that reading was expected and pursued where possible. However, one is not left without insight into this important part of ministerial training in early America. *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, provide a graphic picture of one who took seriously Wesley's instructions concerning reading.

Francis Asbury and Education

By the end of the Revolutionary War, Francis Asbury was clearly the preeminent leader of American Methodism, exerting influence and authority matched by no other. The only one of Wesley's pre-revolutionary missionaries who did not return to England, his dedication to the evangelization of America superceded any desire to return to his homeland. His contributions to American Methodists over his forty-five year ministry in this country earned him the well deserved title of "father of American Methodism."

Asbury had completed his formal education by the age of thirteen and, following the usual pattern for many English commoners, entered into two successive apprenticeships to local craftsmen. Attracted to Methodism, Asbury began attending a local society the year after he left school. His entry into the Methodist itinerant ministry several years later

⁴Jesse Lee, *A Short History of the Methodists in the United States of America* (Baltimore: Magill and Clime, 1810), 99, 126.

⁵Freeborn Garrettson, *The Experiences and Travels of Mr. Freeborn Garrettson* (Philadelphia: Barry Hall, 1791), 15-17.

made him a "helper" to James Glassbrook. When Asbury set sail for America in 1771 he had been an itinerant Methodist preacher in John Wesley's English "connection" of religious societies for four years.⁶

While Asbury's formal education was scant by modern standards, he clearly appropriated Wesley's plan for self-education becoming an able student as may be seen in his reading patterns through the rest of his career.⁷ As a true Wesleyan, he was convinced that it was the Methodists' "duty and privilege . . . to give the key of knowledge in a general way" to all persons willing to learn. It is from this concern that he could urge the establishment by every large society of a school house for Methodist children and others. His interest here was that the Methodists enjoy the rudiments of education in order to, at least, be able to read and improve themselves.

The clue to Asbury's attitude toward learning lies in his address to Bishop McKendree:

Further, it may be asked, Is it proper to have no learned men among us? Answer: Men who are well read I call learned men; and we have men of learning among us, both traveling and local. Where are our young men who were bred to the law? and some were doctors; and many others who were very studious and making great progress in Latin and Greek; and many have competent knowledge of the English language. (III, 491)⁸

The key for Asbury lay in his understanding that men who were well read were learned and educated men. Clearly, he had appropriated Wesley's pattern and saw it as sufficient. That Asbury followed this precept in his own education can be seen by a review of the *Journal and Letters* where his letters also witness to his recommendation of this course to others.

His mature attitudes toward "formal" ministerial education were, nevertheless, ambivalent. As his *Journal and Letters* repeatedly suggest, he had a lively suspicion of a "learned" ministry—that is, one college or university trained. In his words, "Every candid inquirer after truth will acknowledge, upon reading church history, that it was a great and serious evil introduced, when philosophy and human learning were taught as a preparation for Gospel ministry." (II, 488) Or a similar statement quoted by William Duren: "It is said that there is a special call for learned men to the ministry; some may think so, but I presume a simple man can speak and write for simple, plain people, upon simple, plain truths."⁹ While such

⁶Frank Baker, *From Wesley to Asbury: Studies in Early American Methodism*, (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1976), 106-12; L. C. Rudolph, *Francis Asbury* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), 15.

⁷Baker, 112-13.

⁸Francis Asbury, *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, eds. Elmer T. Clarke, et. al., 3 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1958). Cited hereafter within the text by volume and page numbers.

⁹William S. Duren, *Francis Asbury: Founder of American Methodism and Unofficial Minister of State* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1928), 70.

sentiments certainly reflect a disdain for formalized ministerial education, they were intended to reflect that the preaching of the gospel did not *require* such education. In an address to Bishop McKendree late in Asbury's life, he comments, "I have not spoken against learning. I only said that it cannot be said to be an essential qualification to preach the gospel." (III, 481) These sentiments must be seen in the cultural context in which Asbury's ministry took place. In the America of his day, education was rudimentary; and formal university education tended to separate one from the common man—that section of society where Methodism was most effective and appreciated. His attitude toward formalized education might be negative or at best ambivalent, but his attitude toward learning in general was positive; he urged and required the preachers, as Wesley had before him, to educate themselves through constant and selective reading.

Wesley's Writings as Asbury's Spiritual Guide

Asbury's own method of constant reading is well documented in the *Journal* beginning with his comments about his trip to this country. He recounts, "When I came to Bristol I had not one penny of money; but the Lord soon opened the hearts of friends, who supplied me with clothes, and ten pounds." (I, 4) If he had no money, he evidently carried with him a packet of books. Some three weeks later, while at sea, a journal entry records:

I spent my time chiefly in retirement, in prayer and in reading the Appeals, Mr. de Renty's Life, part of Mr. Norris Works, Mr. Edwards on the Work of God in New England, the Pilgrim's progress, the Bible, and Mr. Wesley's Sermons. (I, 5)

This is a most interesting list for, with the exception of the Bible, they are all works of Wesley himself or works that he abridged. The "Appeals" most likely refer to Wesley's *An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* and *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*. These works were Wesley's apology, defense, and explication of Methodist doctrine and practice in the response to Anglican critics of the movement. Wesley abridged *The Holy Life of Monr. de Renty, a late Nobleman of France*, a popular seventeenth century ascetic biography. John Norris, a Cambridge Platonist, had written a well known work of practical instruction, *A Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence*, which was one of the first items abridged and published by Wesley. Wesley had also published Jonathan Edwards' *A Narrative of the late Work of God, at an near Northampton* and *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England*. Perhaps it is the latter of these to which Asbury refers. Asbury probably had John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* in an abbreviated version published by Wesley. Wesley's *Sermons on Several Occasions* were printed in a variety of editions over a number of years and formed the standard body of sermons required of all Methodist preachers. With the exception of Wesley's *Appeals* and *Sermons*, each of

the works listed dealt with the Christian life and practical piety, topics foremost in Asbury's readings throughout his ministry.

This reading list indicates that Asbury was certainly dependent, at least on this occasion, on Wesley and his publications. The fact that Asbury carried these works to America with him suggests the importance attached to reading and Wesley's directions for that reading in this early stage of Asbury's ministry.

Later *Journal and Letters* references note some twenty-three other works which had been abridged by Wesley. Although it is possible that Asbury had the original or full editions, it seems more likely that he was reading them in their Wesleyan abridgements. If that is the case, Wesley's pattern of providing reading materials and, therefore, direction for his helpers bore fruit in the life of Asbury.

References in Asbury's *Journal* to specific Wesley works are most often to the *Sermons* and *The Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*, the standard Methodist guides to doctrine. Next to these stand Wesley's *Journal*, which Asbury found particularly inspiring. Wesley's *Works*, mentioned regularly, incorporated a rather broad spectrum of Wesleyan materials. In addition to these, other specific references include *The Explanatory Notes on the Old Testament*, *A Calm Address to our American Colonies*, *A Calm Address to the Inhabitants of England* (both works in opposition to the American Revolution), *A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists*, *Primitive Physic* (Wesley's practical guide to health cures and remedies), and *Hymns and Sacred Poems*. Asbury also notes reading extensively in *The Christian Library*, Wesley's fifty volume abridgement of the "choicest Pieces of Practical Divinity."

That Asbury should be appreciative of John Wesley and his spiritual guidance is not surprising. The extent of his own recognition of this dependence is often overlooked or clouded by often publicized disagreements between the two men over the organization and polity of American Methodism. Asbury, however, understood his spiritual life and thought to be molded and often identical to that of Wesley. Such an understanding is eloquently stated in a note written in March, 1778:

I have also received much instruction and great blessings of late in reading Mr. Wesley's works. There is a certain spirituality in his works, which I can find in no other human compositions. And a man who has any taste for true piety, can scarce read a few pages in the writings of that great divine, without imbibing a greater relish for the pure and simple religion of Jesus Christ, which is therein so Scripturally and rationally explained and defended. (I, 263)

Asbury's last address to the General Conference of the American Methodist church (which met in the year he died), indicates that in those early years he had "almost laid aside all other books but the Bible, and applied himself exceedingly closely in reading every book that Mr. Wesley had written." (III, 533) Sometimes the dependence had become so great that even Asbury could not be sure of what was his thought and that of Wesley; "Some

of his sentiments I have adopted, and thought them my own; perhaps they are not, for I may have taken them first from him." (I, 339)

Events in the life of the nation, the church, and between the two men were to bring Asbury to a position of independence in later years and certainly his readings broadened, but the appreciation for Wesley's spiritual guidance in his writings and abridgments continued. Yet, Asbury, as one might expect, did not accept Wesley's teachings and interpretations without careful and judicious examination and occasional disagreement: "I have lately been reading Mr. W. on the ruin and recovery of man: he is a judicious writer, in the main, and generally illustrates his subjects well; but some of his sentiments relative to infants, I think, are very exceptionable." (I, 94)¹⁰

Asbury's Other Readings

Asbury's *Journal and Letters* record comments or notations on some 194 different pieces of literature—most of them books. Of these, 164 are credited to 125 different authors. The others are uncredited and simply list titles.¹¹ By modern standards, such a list may appear slim for a lifetime of reading, but it should be remembered that Asbury's situation was much different than our own and even from that of many pastors of his own day. He maintained no home throughout his ministry; therefore, he had no permanent library. He and other Methodists were dependent for books on what they might use from the libraries of others, or purchase in their travels. They also exchanged among themselves books and pamphlets of interest. Asbury gained many works this way. "Oh what a prize! Baxter's *Reformed Pastor* fell into my hands this morning." (II, 647) That books were held in high regard is seen in Asbury's only lament about the loss of Cokesbury College; the college's library had been lost in the fire. (II, 75)

Dependence on the libraries of others is illustrated by Asbury's most extensive catalogue of readings. During the revolution he could not travel freely between the colonies because colonial authorities often required of Englishmen oaths of allegiance to the colonial cause, an oath which entailed denial of one's allegiance to England. Asbury, uneasy at rejecting English citizenship and being a pacifist by religious conviction, determined his position should be one of neutrality in the war. He avoided an oath of allegiance to the colonial cause by retiring for almost two years to the home of Judge Thomas White in Delaware, where allegiance laws were less restrictive. Judge White's well stocked library provided Asbury with an unusual opportunity for a wide range of reading during the months when he could only itinerate in the local area.

¹⁰See also I, 181, III, 533.

¹¹Edward M. Lang, Jr. has helpfully identified many of these and offers interesting suggestions concerning others. Edward M. Lang, Jr., *Francis Asbury's Reading of Theology: A Bibliographical Study*, Garrett Bibliographical Lectures, No. 8, Garrett Theological Seminary Library, Evanston, IL, 1972.

This forced interlude in his travels provided his most extensive opportunity for consistent study and reading. However, as the *Journal and Letters* show Asbury used every opportunity throughout his long life to read. Using representative titles from the works which he noted one is able to see the variety and extent of his study habits.

Scripture

Hardly a day is recorded in the *Journal* without reference to biblical readings or preaching from certain biblical texts. Scripture study, as might be expected, was central in Asbury's reading patterns. He supplemented this Bible reading and study with rather extensive consultation of the commentaries available to him. Wesley's *Notes* were an "especial blessing to my soul." (I, 266) He consulted J. A. Bengelius' *Gnomon Novi Testamenti*, on which Wesley had based a major portion of his *Notes*, John Guyse's *The Practical Expositor: An Exposition of the New Testament in the Form of a Paraphrase* and Philip Doddridge's *The Family Expositor*, also used by Wesley in his own comments on the New Testament. (II, 695; I, 100, 284) Asbury had particularly high praise for Doddridge's exposition: "well calculated for forming of the minds of young preachers," although he disagreed with its suggestions on "the unconditional perseverance of saints." (I, 284) Henry Hammond's critical *Notes on the New Testament* was also consulted. (I, 19) Readings in Martin Luther's *Commentary on Galatians* was noted without comment! (I, 261) Thomas Newton's *Dissertation on the Prophecies* afforded a "good key for many passages, but [he] confines himself too much to the literal meaning of the Revelation." (I, 127, 300) Asbury's fellow Methodist, Adam Clarke, began to publish his *Commentary with Critical Notes* during Asbury's lifetime. Asbury commented that he was well instructed by the work and yet amused for "He [Clarke] indirectly unchristianizes all old bachelors. Woe is me!" (II, 675) As noted in these passages Asbury critically evaluated the materials he read not hesitating to accept that which he thought accurate and questioned that with which he could not agree. It should be noted that he often studied the scriptures in Greek and Hebrew and evidently knew Latin. (I, 735; II, 144) His facility in these languages seems to have been gained without benefit of formal instruction; simply another aspect of self-education. From our modern perspective, it is perhaps these achievements which seem astounding and challenging.

Doctrine

Asbury's basic doctrinal formulations were those given to him by Wesley, and while there was no particular emphasis in his *Journal* on other readings in "Divinity," this area was not neglected. Supplementing Wesley's doctrinal instructions was John Fletcher's *Check's on Antinomianism* and *Further Checks*. Fletcher, an Anglican vicar and strong supporter of Wesley, substantiated Wesley's opposition to his Calvinistic critics. Asbury

was especially complimentary of Fletcher's work: "The style and spirit in which Mr. Fletcher writes, at once bespeak the scholar, the logician, and the divine." (I, 128-9, 300, 330) He also had high praise for Fletcher's *Portrait of St. Paul*. (II, 400)

A work of an American contemporary, J. F. Ostervald, entitled *A Compendium of Christian Theology* was consulted by Asbury and found "simple, plain, and interesting." (I, 745; II, 290) References to "D's *Study of Divinity*" leaves one wondering what work this is, but Asbury found it of little value, except for the list of works on divinity it provided. (I, 568)

Jonathan Edwards' *Treatise Concerning the Religious Affections* (most likely read in Wesley's abridged version) found Asbury praising it as a "very good treatise," particularly for your professors, except for the "small vein in Calvinism which runs through it." (I, 300-1) The sharpest theological differences between American Methodists and their fellow Christians were over Calvinistic tenets, particularly predestination. It is not surprising then that Asbury, during his retirement in Delaware, undertook a review of foundational documents of English Calvinism: *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, *The Assembly's Catechism*, *The Directory of Church Government*, and *The Form of Public Worship*. While he found these pieces were "calculated to convert the judgment, and make the people systematical Christians," he also commented, "now I understand it [the *Confession*, etc.] better than I like it." (I, 322, 323) Nevertheless, if one with these opinions had some insight to offer, Asbury was not hesitant to accept and to compliment its author: a Mr. Knox, of the West Indies, was much praised for providing a "sublime and spiritual" defense of "revealed religion" so that Asbury could "esteem him as one of the best writers amongst the Presbyterians I have yet met with." (I, 455)

Interest in broader theological issues included notations on Uzal Ogden's *On Revealed Religion*, an answer to the "deistical, atheistical oracle of the day, Thomas Paine." (II, 54) Deism was also the interest in his notation of John Claget's comments on Thomas Chubb, an English Deist. (I, 363) Other interests were noted in his recommendation of Devereux Jarratt's discussion of the Baptist doctrine and a similar work by Joseph Moore. (II, 795; I, 353)

To these may be added continual references to the doctrinal materials included in *The Form of Discipline* of the Methodist Episcopal Church. This *Discipline* became, in Asbury's lifetime, the basic manual of polity for the American Methodist church. It contained the *Articles of Religion* (Wesley's reduction of the Anglican *Thirty Nine Articles*), the doctrinal passages of Wesley's *Larger Minutes*, and until 1808 a number of other theological tracts. In 1798 Asbury and Thomas Coke produced a series of *Notes on the Discipline* supplementing and explaining its distinctive Methodist theological emphases. (II, 117, 135)

Asbury was clearly familiar with doctrinal treatises and used them when appropriate as he emphasized and explained Methodist doctrine

and occasionally argued against theological positions he opposed. Nevertheless, his central concern in the writings of divinity lay far more in those works which gave practical instruction in Christian living.

Practical Divinity

John Wesley's concern to provide in *The Christian Library* works of "Practical Divinity" actually reflects a broad interest in seventeenth and eighteenth century theology. Instruction in a dynamically active life modeled after the example of Christ was central to Christian writings of the day. It was this "practical" aspect of the application of the gospel to everyday living that captured the interest and attention of the age.

Among Asbury's choices in this area were some of Wesley's favorites. Thomas a Kempis' *Imitation of Christ* seems to have been Asbury's constant companion, being read and often referred to from 1775 to 1803. (I, 158; III, 263) Asbury also noted a Kempis' *Valley of Lilies* and wondered why Wesley never abridged it. (I, 383) William Law's *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* and Jeremy Taylor's *The Rule and Exercise of Holy Living* were also important sources for him. (I, 248, 334, 152)

Puritans and Nonconformists wrote extensively in these areas and Asbury selected many works from these writers. Joseph Alleine's *An Alarm to Unconverted Sinners* and his *Letters* were consulted. (I, 771, 266) For Richard Baxter, Asbury had a special love and appreciation. Five of Baxter's works are noted with highest appreciation being expressed for his *Call to the Unconverted* which Asbury said was "one of the best pieces of human composition in the world, to awaken the lethargic souls of poor sinner." (I, 248) Baxter's *Saints' Everlasting Rest* along with Isaac Watt's *Treatise on the Rest of Separate Sinners* were called books in which we "find the marrow of Methodism; that is, pure religion, and sound doctrine which cannot be condemned." (I, 242) Asbury additionally commented that he would like to read the *Saint's Rest* once each quarter. (I, 408) A less well known work of Baxter's, *Poor Man's Family Book*, also found commendation. (I, 711) John Bunyan's familiar works *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Holy War* were read with appreciation early in Asbury's American career. (I, 5, 268-69) His general opinion of some of these classical works and their usefulness is seen in this September, 1793 comment:

Our Americans are not fools; no books sell like those on plain, practical subjects; as the *Saints' Rest*, Baxter's *Call*, Alleine's *Alarm*, and Thomas a Kempis. (II, 771)

Works of later Non-Conformists concerned with the same practical divinity included Philip Doddridge's *Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul* about which Asbury commented "I think an abridgment of this work would be a great service to our societies." (I, 268, 324; II, 302) However, another Non-Conformist Thomas Watson's *A Body of Practical Divinity* did not "comport" with Asbury's general sentiments; however, two of his

sermons on temptation were worthy of abridgment. (I, 297) Young's *Poems* (perhaps Edward Young's *The Compliant, or Night Thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality*), along with John Mason's *Self-Knowledge* received attention with complimentary comments. (I, 330, 158) These latter two were eighteenth century English writers. From the same period came one of the few works written by women noted by Asbury, Elizabeth Rowe's *Devout Exercises of the Heart*. (I, 668)

This list of works of practical divinity might continue as these are only representative titles. It is obvious from this brief listing that this area attracted Asbury's repeated and constant attention.

Sermons

Supplementing the interest in practical divinity and perhaps a part of it was Asbury's regular reading of and attention to sermons. Asbury found John Wesley's *Sermons* a "particular blessing to my soul" throughout his ministry and as late as September, 1809, calls them "my study in divinity." (II, 615) To these many others were added through the years. He recounts how, when he was "awakened" to religion at about the age of fourteen before he joined the Methodists, he had begun to read the sermons of George Whitefield and John Cennick, early leaders of the evangelical revival. (I, 721) John Brandon, a seventeenth century divine, through his meditations greatly "melted" Asbury's heart. (I, 109)¹² Philip Doddridge's *Sermons to Young People* received high praise. (II, 33, 154) Jeremy Taylor's *Sermons* provided "many instructing glosses on the Scripture." (I, 668) "A collection of sermons delivered at Berry Street, London, 1733, by Watts, Guyse, Jennings, Neal, Hubbard, and Prince" was praised for its insights. (II, 60) Obviously, sermons drawn from a variety of traditions were an important source for Asbury's thought and preaching.

Religious Biography

Religious biography supplemented the concern for practical divinity during the period and Asbury's readings reflected this pattern of study. References to such works are numerous; most often mentioned were Jonathan Edwards' *Account of the Life of the Rev. Mr. David Brainerd* and *The Holy Life of Monr. de Renty*. (I, 195, 287, 427; II, 5, 193, 304) Martyrological collections such as Samuel Clarke's *General Martyrology* and Richard Burnham's *Select Martyrology* are joined with Daniel Neal's *History of the Puritans* to form a general picture of the trials of Christians through the centuries. (I, 748, 296, 141) George Fox's *Journal* is called "truly wonderful." (II, 647) Numerous other "lives" are cited, usually with the notations of their inspiration for the reader: Bernard Gilpin, Hugh

¹²The editors of Asbury's *Journal and Letters* suggest that perhaps this was Brandon's *Happiness at Hand* but that appears to be a treatise rather than meditations or sermons.

Latimer, John Bruen, John Langston, and Haleburton, to note only a few. (I, 193, 287, 427) However, reading religious biography was not always a positive experience. The *Life of Calvin* brought strong condemnation of predestinarian views. (I, 121)

The lives of Asbury's contemporaries and colleagues also drew his attention. In 1812 he commented "If I recommend you to read any book but the Bible it will be *Fletcher's Life* by Joseph Benson which I have read during this campmeeting." (III, 465, 548) He was understandably distressed, however, by John Whitehead's publication of a *Life of John Wesley* since it criticized Wesley's ordinations. For Asbury, Whitehead had "vilified" Mr. Wesley (and perhaps Asbury himself). (III, 548-49; II, 723)

Religious biography was important for Asbury in the example that it set, particularly during times of stress or criticism, and as a pattern for ministers. It formed, therefore, a significant portion of his reading and recommendations to others.

Pastoral Care

Instruction in the duties of a pastor were included for Methodists in the *Minutes*, *Discipline*, and various *Rules*. To supplement these Asbury found particular help in Richard Baxter's *Gildas Salvianus, or the Reformed Pastor* as it comments on the spiritual health of pastors, methods of overseeing one's congregation, visitation, teaching, etc. Asbury found it a "most excellent book for a Gospel preacher" and commented "Baxter is excellent, super-excellent, and excels the whole." (I, 250; II, 647; III, 436-7) Wesley used portions of this work for instruction of his ministers in the *Minutes* and Asbury commented that Wesley had intended to abridge it. Perhaps it is this work that Asbury, in 1813, marked to "reprint."

Church History and Ecclesiastical Polity

Works on church history occupied much attention in the eighteenth century and Asbury seems to have shared this interest. In Echard (probably Lawrence Echard's *General Ecclesiastical History*) Asbury found much "of the Jews and the Romans, and very little of the pure church." (II, 772) Johann Mosheim's *An Ecclesiastical History* was judged to be "dry and speculative." (I, 148, 578) However, Thomas Prince's *The Christian History* was found to be "Methodist in all its parts" and Asbury had "great desire to reprint an abridgment of it, to show the apostolic children what their fathers were." (II, 4) Clarke's account of Origen's life challenged Asbury to pattern his own Christian life after that of this ancient church father. (I, 121)

While Asbury himself could be critical of those he disagreed with, he saw Johnson's *Apostolical Canons* as revealing a violent Churchman "who had little charity for the Presbyterians upon whom he is unmercifully

severe." (I, 555-56)¹³ Asbury's own biases are evident in his evaluation of David Simpson's condemnation of the Church of England in *A Plea for Religion and the Sacred Writings*. According to Asbury, if Simpson was correct, the Church of England "has the mark of the *Beast* in her hands at least," and is "antichristian" because of the abuses of the episcopacy and the corruption of morals and manners. (II, 600, 514) It is interesting to speculate about how John Wesley might have responded to this comment!

Reading in church history had other attractions for Asbury than simple interest in previous movements or ages. He was under rather intense criticism at several points in his career for the establishment of an episcopacy in America and particularly for his handling of the office. To support his opinion that he had reestablished an apostolic episcopacy, we find him, in 1799, selecting passages from William Cave's *Lives of the Fathers*, a seventeenth century history of the fourth century church which had also influenced Wesley's decision to ordain for America. (II, 184, 290; I, 599)¹⁴ Thomas Comber's *A Discourse upon the Form and Manner of Making, Ordaining, and Consecrating Bishops, Priests, and Deacons* adds to Asbury's knowledge of the episcopacy. (I, 312) John Potter's *Discourse on Church Government* and Comber's comment reinforced Asbury's conviction that the episcopal mode of church government was superior to that of the Presbyterians. (I, 351) However, it was a work by Thomas Haweis printed in 1800 and entitled *An Impartial . . . History of the Rise, Declension, and Revival of the Church of Christ, etc.* that became Asbury's principle source of support for his position. Asbury noted that Haweis was a moderate Episcopalian, judicious and impartial in his opinions. Asbury was not too pleased with Haweis' Calvinism, but when he wrote to Bishop McKendree in 1813, he quoted pages of the book to defend the modified episcopacy established in Methodism. (II, 421-22, 488; III, 479ff).

Methodist history was, as one would expect, of particular interest to Asbury, who reported having read a thousand pages of Charles Atmore's *The Methodist Memorial: Being an Impartial Sketch of the Lives and Characters of the Preachers . . . and a Concise History of Methodism*. (I, 486, 556) Controversy among the Methodists received careful attention and comment in a variety of references. Some of the publications which arose out of these were listed. James O'Kelly's *Apology for Protesting Against the Methodist Episcopal Church* as well as Nicholas Snethen's *Reply to Mr. O'Kelly's Apology* were noted. (II, 204, 246-47) Also, Asbury responded to an unidentified book by B. J. Smith against "our doctrine, discipline, and administration." (II, 757) The work of a British novelist, T. B. Smollett, *The History of England*, was chided for its lack of understanding of the Methodists. (I, 94)

¹³Perhaps John Johnson's *The Clergy-Man's Vade-mecum: containing the Canonical Codes of the Primitive and Universal Church* (London: R. Knaplock, 1714).

¹⁴Cave's full title was *Ecclesiastici, or a History of the Lives, Acts, Deaths, and Writings of the most eminent fathers of the Church in the Fourth Century*.

Two works which emerged out of the seventeenth century Puritan conflicts with the Church of England provided Asbury with solace and arguments against James O'Kelly and others who separated from the Methodist community: *Heart Divisions*, *The Evil of our Times* by Jeremiah Burroughs and *The Cure of Church Divisions* by Richard Baxter. (I, 434; I, 388) Asbury thought them significant enough to abridge and conflated the two publishing them under the title *The Causes, Evils and Cure of Heart and Church Divisions*. (III, 45-46) Obviously history was not only informative to Asbury but its lessons were used to Asbury's advantage wherever possible.

Items of General Interest

Theology and ecclesiastical interest without question dominated Asbury's readings, but a brief look at some of his more general reading reveals broader vistas as well. There is little note of classical philosophers except an appeal to John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau for support of the Methodist admonition against idleness and play. (III, 55) Asbury's interest in history, shared by many in the eighteenth century, carried him into several areas. Josephus' *The Jewish Antiquities*, edited by William Whiston, indicated a curiosity about the Jewish community, although he found Josephus to be a "dry, chronological work." (II, 494; I, 254, 260) Charles Rolin's *Ancient History of the Egyptians, Carthaginians, etc.* provided commendation of the Persians and acquaintance with the life of Socrates. (I, 400-01) The activities of the Romans and Goths as well as accounts of the early church were appreciatively gleaned from *An Universal History from the Earliest Account of Time* printed for T. Osborn. (I, 245) Asbury said he had read sixteen volumes of the work that contained sixty-four volumes! He was sympathetically drawn to the Waldensians and Albigenses in an uncredited work and impressed by an extensive *History of the French Revolution*. (I, 121; II, 41) To these were added curiosity about other lands in works such as Mungo Park's *Travels in Africa*, which Asbury found to be so extraordinary that the descriptions appeared to read like a romance. (II, 494-95)

American history seems to have been of particular interest to Asbury. William Gordon's *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Establishment, of the Independence of the United States of America* was praised for its general view, but especially for its picture of Washington's farewell to his troops. (I, 709, 748; II, 4) John Marshall's *Life of Washington* gained praise for, "There is nothing in the work beneath the man of honour; there are no malevolent sentiments, or bitter expressions, derogatory to the character of a Christian." Only perhaps Jeremy Belknap's *American Biography* could exceed Marshall. (II, 484) *An Historical . . . View of the United States* by William Winterbotham reminded Asbury that by 1797 George Washington was criticized for being partial to aristocrats and continental officers. Asbury suggested that since it was the officers who fought

for liberty, they deserved any commendation they received. He added, "As to myself the longer I live, and the more I investigate, the more I applaud the uniform conduct of President Washington in all the important stations he filled." (II, 76, 115) Obviously Washington was one of Asbury's favorites. Other matters of American history also received attention. Asbury's reference to Ramsey's *History* as he itinerated in South Carolina perhaps refers to David Ramsey's *The History of the Revolution in South Carolina*, although Ramsey also published a number of other historical works. (II, 622) Thomas Jefferson's *Notes* were read in their "most essential parts." If this is a reference to Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*, perhaps Asbury read the work for theological purposes since it contained passages which brought charges of religious infidelity against Jefferson. (I, 732)

Asbury, like Wesley, shared a concern for the physical well-being of his people, wanting to help their bodies as well as their souls. The Englishman Richard Brooke's *The General Practices of Physic* was mentioned and Asbury himself seems to have been instrumental in encouraging Henry Wilkins, M. D., to publish an American equivalent to Wesley's *Primitive Physic*. (III, 500-01) The full title of the work elaborates a common conviction that only Americans could deal with their peculiar diseases: *Family Adviser, or a Plain and Modern Practice of Physic: Calculated for the Use of Families Who Have Not the Advantages of a Physician and Acquainted to the Diseases of America, to which is Annexed Mr. Wesley's Primitive Physic*.

Retrospect

From this catalogue of readings by American Methodism's most influential and well known early Bishop it can be seen that the second element in Wesley's method of training laypastors was taken seriously and, applied over a life-time, provided an impressive education. Several items stand out in a review of these readings.

It was possible during the American Revolution and the years following for a man who incessantly traveled the length and breadth of the country to continue to educate himself. While such an education could not compare with that of the Wesleys or many college and university trained American ministers, it was extensive for a person in Asbury's circumstances. This education might not be classical, but it was fairly broad, including languages. Finally, Asbury's failure to publish sermons or other books in which we might have direct insight into his theology does not leave us totally devoid of information about his theological interest, beliefs, and ideas. The *Journal and Letters* and the lists of books they contain provide us with illuminating insights into these areas.

Wesley's conviction that laypersons could and would train themselves for ministry certainly proved to be a valid one in America. Asbury's example was followed by many and Methodist ministerial education

continued to contain a large element of informal learning into the present century. Expanding on Wesley's basic principle, the American church in 1816 began to develop a specific "Course of Study" for its ministers, essentially a specified reading list, which still depended on the individual pastor to educate himself as he served his congregation. Formal college education among Methodists would slowly become available with seminary education developing late in the nineteenth century, but Methodists were not left untrained. Wesley's instructions that one must read and develop a taste for it were continually repeated throughout the American Methodist conferences as they sought to encourage their members to train themselves.